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ABSTRACT

A high school program is described that uses an informal survey to help teachers identify potential academic, social, and career oriented problems facing mainstreamed handicapped students. These problems and suggested intervention procedures are listed for study/coping skills of time management, memory systems, listening ability, compensatory skills for dealing with textbooks, study skills, and test taking skills. Names of representative commercial materials to improve academic performance are provided. Difficulties in the social skill areas of self awareness, self esteem, and decision making are considered and approaches to improving the skills suggested. Career awareness is the third major area of focus. Techniques for helping students determine their aptitudes and become aware of the types of jobs available are briefly covered. (CL)

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Abstract

Many students with learning problems are unable to cope with demands in the mainstreamed school environment due to deficits in study skills and social skills. A survey was designed for regular classroom teachers to complete for each mainstreamed student in their classes. The survey items were designed to create awareness of specific types of problems the students might experience as well as to provide information on which to base study skills and social skills courses. The survey was repeated near the end of the school year. A positive shift in student academic and social behaviors was observed although numbers large enough to be statistically significant have not been generated.

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Coping Skills

Many students with learning problems experience increased difficulty in coping with the school environment as they progress in school. Academic demands, increased peer pressure, less individual attention and support, as well as decisions regarding future vocational choices all contribute to the complex problems faced by these students.

Academic demands change from emphasis on learning basic skills in elementary school to application of these skills in the upper grades (Alley & Deshler, 1978, Mann, Goodman, & Wiederholt, 1978). Many investigators (Bryan, 1974; Johnson Myklebust, 1964; Kronick, 1976; Siegel, 1974) have discussed the relationship between social skills and learning problems. Bader (1975) pointed out that we have assumed that improvement of academic skills would solve all problems. It appears that many students with learning problems can benefit from programs that focus on developing skill in both the academic and social

areas in order to cope with the demands of the school environment.

This paper will present a description of a secondary school program designed to improve regular classroom teachers' awareness of the types of problems students with learning difficulties might encounter, and activities to improve study skills, social skills, and career awareness.

Preparing Students for Mainstreaming

The secondary school program to be described is located in a suburban area that reflects a predominately middle class socioeconomic population. The school is racially integrated and is comprised of grades nine through twelve with approximately 3,000 students. There are classes for mentally retarded, learning disabled, emotionally handicapped, and gifted students.

There are three primary goals and concerns for secondary exceptional students in this school:

1. for the students to complete school by fulfilling the regular graduation requirements,

2. for the students to develop a positive attitude toward the educational process, and

3. for the handicapped students to leave school with some employable skill

The following program was planned to help achieve these goals.

English (basic or advanced), mathematics, science (advanced), study skills, and social skills courses are offered by the Exceptional Student Department. Exceptional students may take these courses in the Exceptional Education Department or in a regular class depending on

Notice that the emphasis in the ninth grade is to prepare the pupils for academic success. Gradually academic support skills are phased out to be replaced by vocational training. This schedule is appropriate for mentally retarded, learning disabled, and emotionally handicapped pupils. Gifted pupils typically focus on academic coursework and placement with mentors.

Exceptional Education faculty make an extra effort to be involved and visable in all school activities. An attempt is made to know each faculty member personally although there are over 200 teachers in this school. Exceptional Education faculty join different groups for lunch. They express genuine interest in problems in regular classroom.

A survey was developed in order to gain information regarding the teachers' perceptions of students' behavior and to serve as an informal "inservice" mechanism. The survey was distributed to the regular classroom teachers of students who were enrolled in the study skills course, the social skills course or both. Items for the survey were selected to help teachers focus on areas that might cause poor academic performance in the class or might cause the student to be less well accepted. It was

expected that teachers completing the survey would become aware of deficit skills of the exceptional students. It was hoped that modification of instructional technique would result from this awareness.

Near the end of the school year regular classroom teachers were asked to complete the survey again for each student. A positive shift in student behaviors provided information on the effectiveness of the study skills and/or social skills courses. There has been an increase in positive results although large enough numbers have not been generated to be statistically significant.

EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Student: _____

Teacher: _____

Subject: _____

Date: _____

This is an evaluation checklist to help us better deal with ECE students in the Study Skills and Social Skills program. Please read this list of behaviors and fill out the questionnaire on this student. Feel free to make any comments about a specific behavior or in general about this student.

	Usually	Sometime	Never	Comments
1. Is punctual				
2. Brings materials to class				
3. Is polite to peers and teachers				
4. Uses appropriate language (little profanity or verbal abuse)				
5. Completes class assignments				
6. Completes homework assignments				
7. Controls temper				
8. Participates in class discussions and activities				
9. Obeys class rules				

	Usually	Sometimes	Never	Comments
10. Takes class notes				
11. Displays positive attitude toward learning				
12. Can follow oral directions				
13. Can follow written directions				
14. Resonably neat written work - handwriting legible				
15. Will ask for help when needed				
16. Can copy from chalkboard, transparency, etc.				
17. Keeps track of assignments				
18. Oral answers betten than written answers				
19. Seems to worry a lot; anxious				
20. Seems immature				
21. Restless; displays excessive or irrelevant movement				
22. Shows destructive tendency toward property				
23. Untidy appearance causes negative reaction from teacher				
24. Sullen appearance				

	Usually	Sometimes	Never	Comments
25. Argues with teacher				
26. Argues with other students				
27. Appears to daydream				
28. Seems to frequently run out of time				
29. Has difficulty accepting failure in a task				

Study/Coping Skills

Academic success, defined here as achieving grades satisfactory to acquire school credit, requires some degree of competence in the following areas: (1) time management, (2) memory systems, (3) listening ability, (4) compensatory skills for dealing with textbooks, (5) study skills, and (6) test taking skills. Students with poor learning aptitude can improve their skill in these areas. Suggested activities follow.

Time Management

A common characteristic of these students is poor time management. Frequently they run out of time before completing tests, class assignments, and homework.

Awareness of time can be developed by activities such as the following. Have time a criterion for completing assignments. For example, the student will complete six problems in eight minutes. Change assignments on the basis of time. Reward effective use of time. Have students estimate the time it will take to complete a task, then compare the actual time it took.

A procedure for developing time management can begin by having the students keep a daily record of everything they do during the day including the time required. It is

important to provide examples so that the students will realize they must record such things as time spent talking on the telephone, time spent waiting in the dentist's office, and actual time spent in household duties. After the students have kept accurate records for a week they should have an idea of how they are occupying this time.

Next, have the students list all events they must schedule for the next week. Again, provide examples such as sports practice, shopping for a gift, and library research.

Now the students are ready to plan a weekly schedule. When the students have mastered the implementation of a weekly schedule, they can begin to plan on a monthly basis. For secondary school students it is frequently helpful to schedule specific subject matter assignments. There are usually more long term projects such as book reports that require planning by stages to prevent an inadequate last-minute effort. In some cases, a semester plan may be appropriate.

Memory

Many students with poor learning aptitude have difficulty remembering information heard or seen. Information must be maintained in short term memory, encoded in

a meaningful organization, and transferred to long term memory. A common myth concerning memory is that simple repetition will insure recall. In fact, meaningfulness of the material and intensity of attention have a greater effect on retention (Lerner, 1981).

Meaningfulness of material can be enhanced by relating what is learned in school to the real world. For example, English measurement to metric conversions are more meaningful when the students determine their height and weight and the distance from their homes to the school because these are practical applications. Computing mixed fractions by preparing one and one-half recipes of some treat has more meaning than a page of abstract problems.

Practicing mental imagery can facilitate retention of material. For instance, the study of vocabulary words can be enhanced by having students form a mental picture associating the word with experience such as relating the word uncouth with some awkward event they have witnessed.

Having students reconstruct information by restating it in their own words is another way to expedite retention of information. Relating what is learned in school to

something the students are interested in will add to the meaningfulness of the material. The concept of centifugal force can be explained by referring to the experience of turning a curve on a motorcycle.

Intensity of attention can be stimulated in several ways. Setting a goal for accomplishment can be helpful. Deciding to complete five references for a report or planning to work ten mathematics problems before dinner are examples.

Active involvement in the learning process can focus attention. Conducting a science experiment exemplifies this type of learning. Active learning techniques employed with young children should continue in the upper grades.

Varying the method of presentation can help to intensify attention to task. Use of games and machines such as a Language Master can vary instruction. Color, size, shape and other attributes of materials can be changed in order to improve attention to task.

Listening and Notetaking

Listening can be improved through the use of several strategies. A mental "set" to listen is important. Reviewing notes and material that have previously been

read or discussed will help students tune into the forthcoming lecture. Helping students to recognize nonverbal cues is important. Facial expression, body position, and pauses in communication carry various kinds of messages. Students can practice recognizing nonverbal cues by recording these messages when watching a speech, television program or movie. Verbal cues such as voice inflection and pace also need to be taught.

Listening for organizational clues is important. Students can be asked to listen for words such as first, the major reason, in addition, and in summary, that provide structure to the oral message. It is important for students to try to visualize what they hear. Some messages can be restated or written in the students' own words.

Students should be encouraged to ask questions for clarification. They should be made aware that their nonverbal clues such as quizzical facial expression can let the teacher know they have not understood.

Notetaking can be improved by short practice sessions followed by immediate correction. Recorded material can also be used. Recorded material allows the student to self-check by replaying the message.

It is important for students to review their notes as soon as possible after writing them. This review helps them to clarify, make corrections, and add information they failed to record, as well as aiding retention of information. Summary statements may also be prepared. These notes can then be scanned to prepare a mental "set" before the next session.

Compensatory Skills

Many students are at a disadvantage academically because they cannot deal with the testbooks. Teaching the students to be aware of the structure of the material is helpful. Frequently, students are unaware of the format of the testbooks they are using. They may need to be taught where to find lists of major points in the chapter. It is useful to help students form the habit of reading the questions at the end of the chapter or unit prior to reading the material.

Several briefing techniques have been suggested to prepare students to master content material. Among the most popular survey techniques is the SQ3R method. While this method is suggested to be used on material at the students' instructional level, there is some benefit in applying the technique to difficult material.

In the first step the student skims the title, introduction, section headings, picture captions, and summary of a chapter. Next, questions are formulated from section headings to speculate what the content will be about. Now the material is read, followed by reciting or answering questions and summarizing the information. Oral or written review of main ideas and concepts from the material follows. Even though poor readers may fail to thoroughly read the material, this method teaches them a succinct strategy for identifying the most important points of the content.

Study Skills

Taking notes from written passages is more beneficial for problem learners than underlining passages in textbooks. Outlining is the perferred method for taking notes from textbook material. In general, a sentence outline will provide more complete information than a topic outline. The students should write the outline in their own words rather than copying the author's words.

The organization of textbooks is usually conducive to outlining. Teach the students that section headings and subdivisions within these sections identify major ideas. When they are proficient in outlining the section

headings (Roman numerals) and subdivisions (upper case letters), details (arabic numerals) can be added.

Teaching the two-column format of notetaking may be useful. The paper is divided vertically with space left on one side of the page. Class notes and additional information can then be combined with the written outline.

Diagrams and other graphic systems can provide a visual relationship of the information. One format is to represent the main idea with a tree trunk, subtopics with branching limbs, and details with leaves. A modification of this system is to use a central box for the main idea radiating lines for subtopics, and adjacent lines for details.

Developing skill in taking written tests is of prime improtance for students with learning problems. Performance on tests can be improved by teaching techniques to use before, during, and after taking tests.

Teach students to determine exactly what material will be covered on the test and what types of questions will be asked. Teach the students to recognize and understand vocabulary used in testing (describe, list, select the best answer). Have them set up a study schedule. A regular schedule for review is best.

Teach students to use the following techniques during the test. Review the test and estimate the amount of time to be spent on each question or section of the test. Read questions carefully to identify clue words to ascertain precisely what is being asked. Skip different questions and come back to them if time permits. Determine whether the answer is sensible or not. Review the test when it is completed.

A strategy for answering different types of test questions can improve test performance. Teach students that if part of a true-false statement is false, the answer should be marked false. Words such as never or always frequently provide clues. Multiple choice questions should be read to see if they know the answer. Then choose the best answer from the choices provided. Remind students when completing matching questions to answer those they are sure of and then cross them off. Try to guess which of the remaining items are correct.

The following are representative of the types of commercial material that might be used to improve academic performance.

- Grolier Study Skills
  Grolier Educational Corporation
  Sherman Turnpike
  Danburg, Connecticut
- Study Skills Series
  Media Materials, Inc.
  Baltimore, Maryland
- Listening Comprehension Training Program
  TML Enterprises, Inc.
  Bel Air, Maryland
- Reference Tools and Study Skills
  Milliken Publishing Company
  St. Louis, Missouri
- Research and Study Skills
  The Instructor Publishing Company
  Denville, New York
- Improving Test Scores
  Scholastic Book Services
  New York, New York

Social/Coping Skills

Low self-esteem, poor social judgement, overreaction, and gullibility are among the deficit areas that characterize some students with learning problems. Kronick (1981)

suggests that "being imperfectly aware of organization of social encounter, will not organize their behavior efficiently and optimally" (p. 99).

Among the techniques that might be used to develop social skills are role-playing, discussions, puppetry, modeling, counseling, group meetings, and simulated social training programs and workbooks. Many commercial materials are available for developing social skills. Suggested activities follow.

Social skills that elicit acceptance from others are equally as important as academic skills for the student with learning problems. Many of these students have difficulty coping with the expected norms of the school environment. Peer relationship and teacher - pleasing behaviors may be unsatisfactory. Some students have difficulty dealing with social pressures. Discussions concerning career choices may cause confusion. Social skills can be improved by using a variety of activities. To be effective the teacher must build a relationship of trust with the students.

Self-Awareness

Frequently, students can benefit from self-awareness activities. One technique for helping students understand

themselves is to have them form pairs and interview each other assuming the role of a newspaper reporter. A list of guide questions such as the following can be supplied.

> If you had an hour to spend any way you wanted, what would you do? What is your favorite hobby? person? food? sport? subject? why? How do you spend your money?

Students can be given ~~a list of items and~~ a specific amount of money and a list of auction items. An auction can be conducted with students biding on the items. Follow the auction with a discussion focusing on why each student valued the selected items. This activity can be varied by using a newspaper classified advertisement section to provide items for purchase.

Another activity to develop self-awareness is to have students list their 5 best qualities and their 5 worst qualities. Discuss why students selected these qualities and what they would like to change.

Students can also become aware of their defense mechanisms and moods. Have students list things that make them happy, sad, frustrated, or angry. Ask why these things make them feel the way they do. Discuss their reaction to these situations. Do they avoid them? Blame others? Share their feelings?

Have students analyze the roles they play. When did they act like a friend, child, counselor, or enemy? These roles can be formed into a chart with the added dimension of whom the interaction was with: teachers, peers, parents, or authority figures. This activity is especially effective for helping students recognize responses in personal interactions.

After students have used self-examination to understand themselves, they can then set goals in the areas they want to improve. Writing their own obituary as they would like to be remembered is one way for them to formalize their goals. After the goals are set, have the students grade their efforts each day in achieving their goals. Areas might include being on time, not arguing, accepting criticism, or making positive comments instead of "killer" statements. They might also list the occasions when they did accomplish the goal, such as being on time for history and math. This will help them to see progress in achieving their goals.

Self-Esteem

Many students who are deficient in social skills have feelings of low self-esteem. Activities such as this may help students to improve feelings of self-worth.

Have students list things they did to make someone feel worthy such as the nicest thing they did for someone during the day or something they taught someone. Students can also list the strengths they see in each member of the group. These activities should be followed by discussion, particularly focusing on feelings of getting and giving positive comments.

Another area of social awareness that is of interest to most students, especially adolescents, is dating. Discussions and role playing can be used to learn such things as who pays for what, introductions, asking for a date, getting into a car and through doors, and appropriate places to go on a date.

Decision-Making

Helping students learn to make rational decisions is important. Students need to clarify their values in decision making.

Have students list the 5 most important decisions they made in a day. Analyze why each decision was made. On what value was each decision made (family, money, helping someone, education, etc.)? Have students list alternative actions they could have taken in making each

decision and the consequences of these alternative actions. After sessions of this type, have students list at least 5 values that they use in making decisions.

Situations can be provided for decision making discussions. The classic situation for students seems to be, "If your friend cheated on a test, should you tell the teacher?" Alternative decisions and consequences of each should be discussed.

Students should develop skill in step-by-step planning for making decisions. The activities described will help students become aware of this process. Handling peer pressure may present a problem for some students. Subjects such as drugs, sex, authority are areas of prime importance to students.

Newspaper articles provide relevant materials on which to base discussions. Hypothetical situations can also be provided for discussion. Lifespace interviewing, that is, a thorough investigation of a situation just as it occurs, can also be very helpful to students.

Representative materials for developing social skills are listed below.

- The Coping With Books
  American Guidance Services, Inc.
  Circle Pines, Minnesota
- Making Sense of Our Lifes - Values Clarification Theme Kit
  Argus Communications
  Niles, Illinois
- Managing Yourself
  J. Weston Walch, Publisher
  Portland, Maine
- Life Skills
  Educational Design, Inc.
  New York, N. Y.
- Deciding for Myself
  Winston Press
  Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Communicating with Others
  Stech - Vaughn Company
  Austin, Texas

Career Awareness

Career awareness is of paramount importance to most students with learning problems. Many students are unaware of types of jobs available and their own aptitudes. The goal of career awareness for these students is to

help them to become aware of the interaction between these two variables.

Techniques for helping students discover their strengths and aptitudes have been discussed. One technique for becoming aware of possible careers is to have students list all of the jobs they can think of, followed by a list of skills needed to perform the job successfully. For instance, a salesperson must be able to get along well with other people, must know his product, and must be enthusiastic. Expected income for each job should be investigated as well as need for personnel in that field.

Students can also collect application forms for various positions. These can be analyzed to determine what employers are interested in, what kind of testing is required, etc.

Having resource people such as lawyers and mechanics speak to class can provide information. Field trips to various business and offices are effective ways to become aware of career possibilities.

Summary

A high school program has been described that uses an informal survey to provide awareness of some types of

problems students may experience in their classes. The survey also provides information of the types of problems the teachers perceive are affecting academic success as well as social acceptance. This information is used to form the basis for study skills and coping skills courses designed to improve these students' coping abilities. Examples of activities have been presented. It has been suggested that improved study skills, social skills, and career awareness can result in greater school success for students with learning problems.

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